



# CED 714

## Religious Inclusivity in Scouting: The Commissioner's Role

Revision Date: 12/31/2025

# Learning Objectives



- By the end of this session, a commissioner should be able to:
  - **Understand** the shifting religious affiliations and identities in America
  - **Describe** the relationships between Scouting America, the values of scouting, and religion
  - **Explain** how units can use inclusive practices to support the values of scouting in a religiously diverse America

# A Note on Charter Organizations



**This presentation discusses religious inclusivity. Some units chartered by faith-based organizations choose to limit unit membership to members of one faith. The contents of this presentation may not be applicable to units that have chosen to restrict membership to a particular religion.**

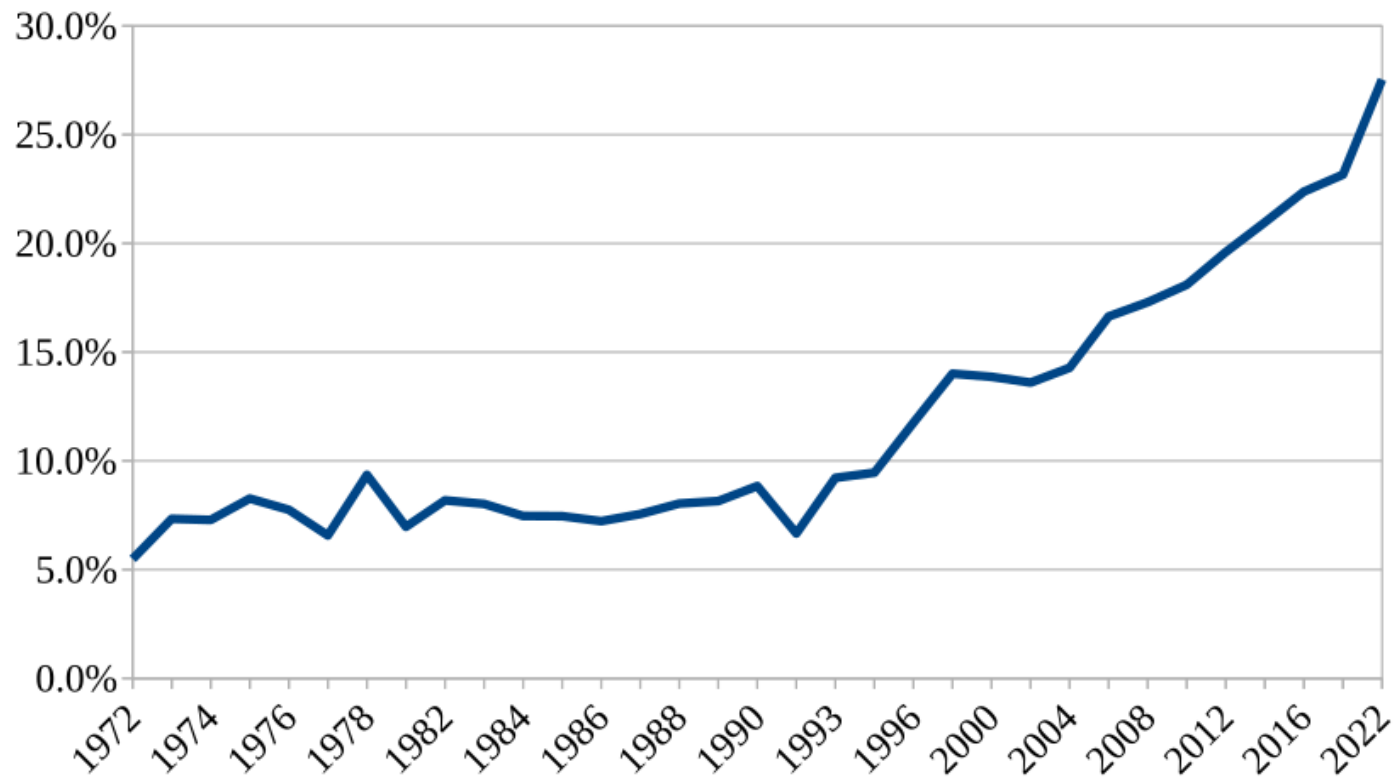
# Changes in Americans' Religious Affiliations



# Changes in Americans' Religious Affiliations



## Percent of Americans who identify as having no religion

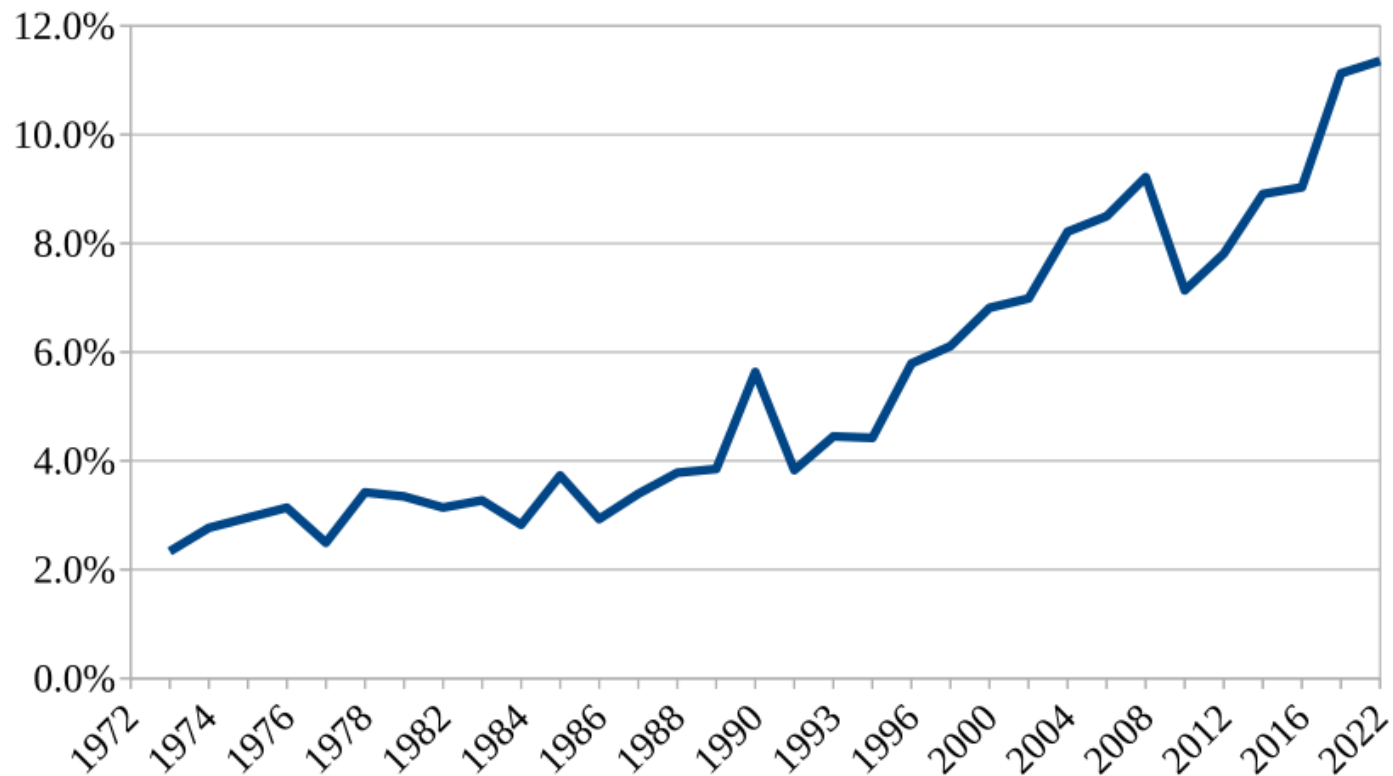


Source:  
General  
Social  
Survey

# Changes in Americans' Religious Affiliations



Percent of Americans who were raised without a religion

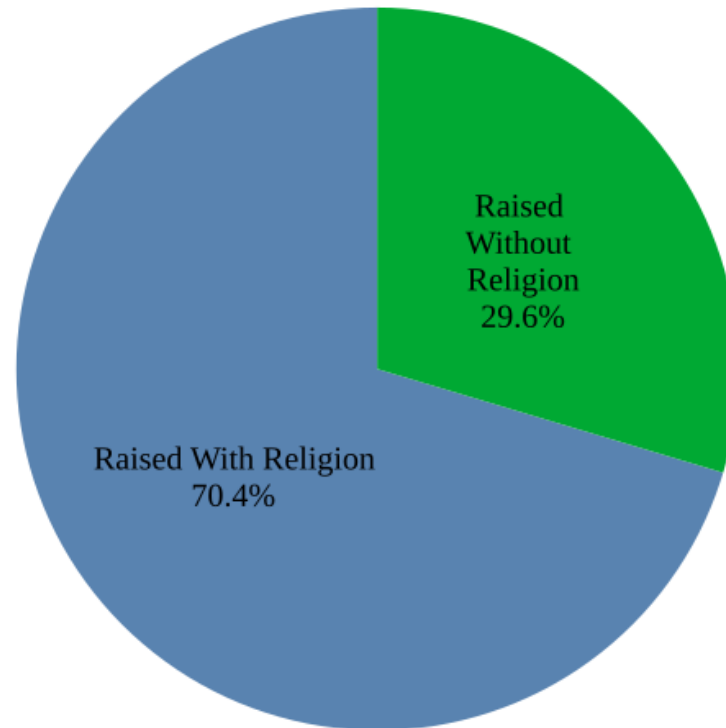


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# Changes in Americans' Religious Affiliations



## Religious upbringing of Americans who identify as having no religion



Source:  
General  
Social  
Survey

# Reasons for Leaving



People have “many and varied” reasons for leaving religion



# Reasons for leaving and what it means



- **Push and Pull Factors:**

- **Morality** – Disagreements with positions on social and behavioral teachings
- **Political** – Increasing alignment of religious institutions and political parties
- **Doctrine** – Not accepting the beliefs of the religion
- **Hypocrisy** – Seeing religious leaders violating moral standards
- **Other Activities** – Preferring other activities to religious services
- **Autonomy** – Wanting to find their own path
- **Generational Change** – More people raised without religion, and increased acceptance of those who leave religion

Source: “Goodbye Religion: The Causes and Consequences of Secularization” by Cragun and Smith (2024)

# What Does this Mean?



Scouting offers  
many of these  
needs

# Scouting America's Mission, Religion, and the Values of Scouting

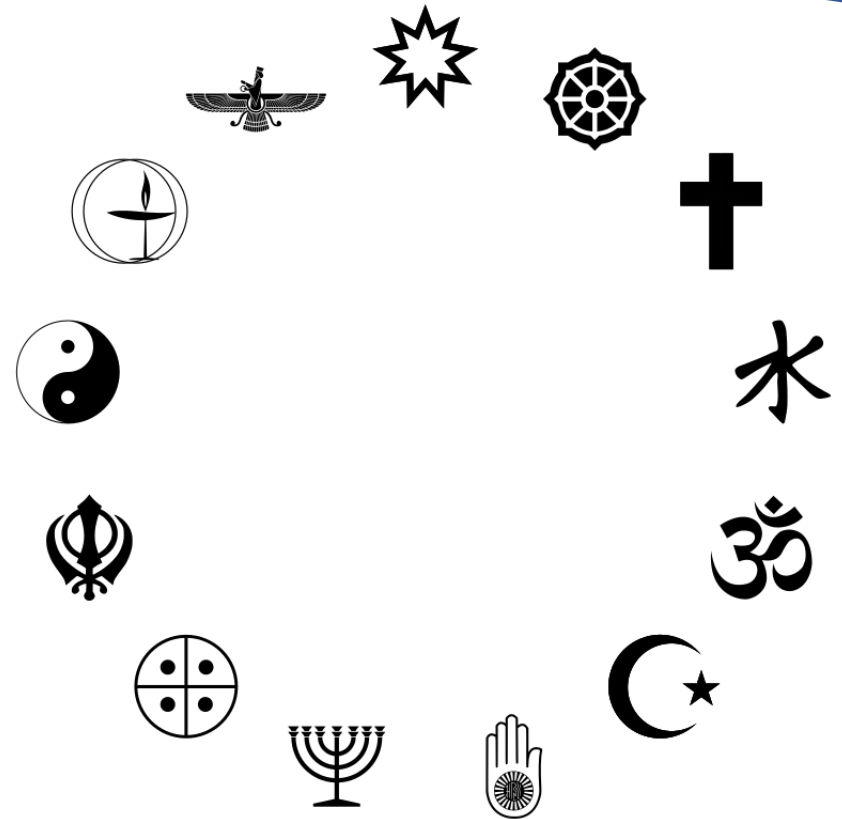


The mission of Scouting America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.

# Religion and Scouting



- Diverse mixture of religions represented among chartering organizations
- Nearly 40,000 units (42%) are chartered by a faith-based organization as of 2025
  - (Down from 72% in 2013)



# Current Policy and Practices



## Scouting America's Diversity Statement:

**“Scouting America promotes a culture where each youth, volunteer, and employee feels a sense of belonging and builds communities where every person feels respected and valued. Leading by example and encouraging each other to live by the values expressed by the Scout Oath and Scout Law, we welcome families of all backgrounds to help prepare young people to serve as successful members and leaders of our nation’s increasingly diverse communities.”**



# Current Policy and Practices

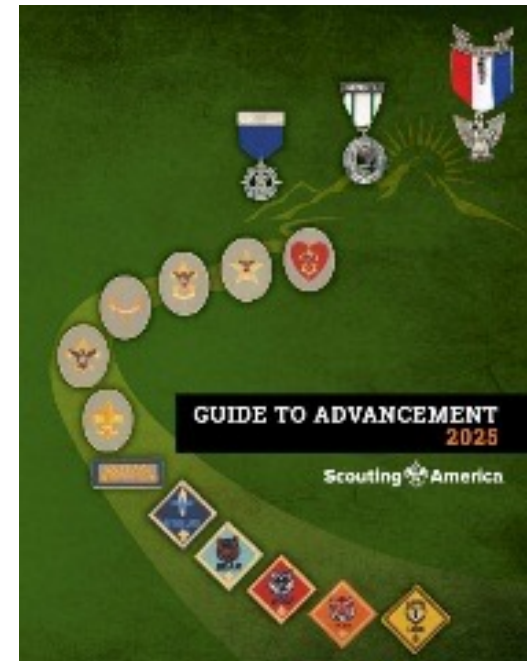


## Guide to Advancement:

- “Scouting America does not define what constitutes belief in God or practice of religion. Neither does Scouting America require membership in a religious organization or association for membership in the movement. If a Scout does not belong to a religious organization or association, then the Scout’s parent(s) or guardian(s) will be considered responsible for religious training. All that is required is the acknowledgment of belief in God as stated in the Declaration of Religious Principle and the Scout Oath, and the ability to be reverent as stated in the Scout Law.”

## • Basic Adult Leader Outdoor Orientation (BALOO) Instructor Syllabus

- The “duty to God may be practiced as ‘respect for other people and their beliefs.’”



# Inclusive Practices for Supporting Duty to God and Reverence in Units



## Cub Scouts:

- Family & Reverence Adventures are typically completed at home, with family
- Can be done as a den or pack IF certain requirements are met:
  - “If your pack is chartered by a religious organization and every member of the den is also a member of that same religious organization, you can consider conducting these activities at den or pack meetings under the guidance of someone from your chartering organization. Still, leaders should ensure that every parent and guardian is aware of the content and the activities that the den will do and allow parents to opt out and complete the requirement at home, should they choose to do so.” - Aaron on Scouting (official Scouting America blog)



# Inclusive Practices for Supporting Duty to God and Reverence in Units



## Scouts BSA:

- Most ranks include a Duty to God requirement
- Leaves interpretation up to the Scout and their family.
- Scouting America's diversity statement and Guide to Advancement both leave such matters to family and, if applicable, religious leaders.



# Inclusive practices for supporting Duty to God and Reverence



## Outdoor Leadership Training

- Advice from the BALOO syllabus (relevant for packs, troops, crews, and ships)



# The Commissioner's Role in Supporting Religious Inclusiveness



- Reinforce both the importance of duty to God and reverence
- Direct leaders and parents to policies, practices, and other resources
- Encourage parents and leaders to keep Scouting America's mission statement in mind



**Reminder:**



**A Scout is Courteous. We welcome every family committed to the Scout Oath and Law. We prohibit bullying, harassment, and unlawful discrimination—online and in person—and we expect leaders to ensure a respectful environment for all youth.**

# Supporting Religious Inclusiveness in Units Activity



**A unit leader has approached you to get your input on an ongoing conversation within the unit.**

**A few families have recently joined the unit and are new to Scouting. These families identify as non-religious and have requested guidance on fulfilling their duty to God and being reverent.**

**The unit leader has already reminded the family that Scouting America defers to the family for religious matters, but the family would like some examples of how to meet the duty to God and reverence expectations in ways that are not specific to one religion.**

**The unit leader would like your advice as a commissioner.**

# Summary



- **Religious affiliations and religious identities are shifting in America**
  - **More Americans identify as non-religious**
- **Scouting America, as well as the values of scouting, are designed to be nondenominational and do not require religious membership**
- **Units can use inclusive practices to support the values of Scouting in a religiously diverse America**



**Questions?  
Comments!**

